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NH elected officials want more public hearing on gas pipeline plan

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – All four of New Hampshire's elected federal officials want Kinder Morgan to hold more public meetings about its plan to run a natural gas pipeline through southern New Hampshire/

U.S. senators Jeanne Shaheen and Kelly Ayotte, and representatives Annie Kuster and Frank Guinta all signed a letter urging the Houston- Texas-based company to "hold a second round of open houses during the coming months in potentially affected communities to allow New Hampshire residents to better review and understand information, assess potential impact and meaningfully express their views in an open and transparent setting. "

The Feb. 27 letter notes that meetings have been held in Hudson, Londonderry, Milford, Rindge and Winchester about what is called the Northeast Energy Direct Project. All meetings have drawn large crowds, mostly critical of the idea, with people expressing concern about the effect of the pipeline and its construction on property values, public lands, and safety.

Many businesses support the idea of bringing more natural gas into New England from shale fields in the mid-Atlantic states, arguing that it will lower electricity costs. About half of New England's electricity is generated by gas-fired power plants.

Last month, the four members of the state's federal delegation wrote to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which must rule that the project is necessary before it can proceed, asking it to push back schedules to allow more time for discussing the project. FERC is currently expected to discuss the project this fall.

The Kinder Morgan project would run across southern New Hampshire through 17 towns, including Brookline, Milford, Amherst, Merrimack and Litchfield, connecting to existing pipelines in Londonderry.

A separate pipeline project support by Eversource Energy, the parent company of what was previously called PSNH, plus National Grid and Texas-based Spectra Energy would the existing Algonquin pipeline from New Jersey and the Maritimes and Northeast pipeline from Canada.

Both projects would cost several billions dollars and would start carrying gas i 2018 at the earliest. Officials on all companies say they are not in competition and that New England heating and power usage could absorb added production from both of them; critics say they are primarily aimed at future export markets, rather than helping New England.

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